**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**53. FLESH AND BLOOD**

*"I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews therefore contended with one another, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus therefore said to them, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me, he will also live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven-not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

*John 6:51-58*

OUR LORD'S use of the terms "flesh and blood " in parabolic illustration is admittedly startling. So it appeared to many of His disciples at the time. John tells us that "Many therefore of His disciples when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" The word "hard" there had a very definite significance, which is hardly conveyed by our translation. The Greek word *skleros* means rough, in the sense of being objectionable. We really get nearer to what the disciples said if we substitute that word. "This is an objectionable saying, who can hear it?"

Moreover the use of the figure was divisive. It created a crisis. It was a climax definitely in the course of our Lord's ministry. As we have said, John records, "Upon this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." It is quite evident that what He said was of a very startling nature, greatly mystifying those who heard it, and even His disciples, listening very much upon the surface of things, said, This is too much, this is a hard saying; this is a rough saying. This looks foolish. Indeed they were so much offended, many of them, that they went back, never to return to Him. It was a divisive word.

To us also it does remain a startling illustration. While not entering into any controversy such as had gathered around this saying of Jesus, suffice it for us to dismiss the idea that this saying of our Lord has anything to do with what we call the Holy Communion. It has been applied in that way largely by certain theologians of whom we speak with respect, but from whom we profoundly differ. Our Lord was not referring to the Communion here at all, not even in a secondary sense. But seeing that a great deal of controversy has waged around this saying through the running years of theological consideration, at least it behoves us to consider this carefully, and pray for the help of the Spirit to an understanding of what our Lord really meant.

So, taking our usual method, we consider first, what was the subject He intended to illustrate, for it was an illustration. Secondly, we pause with the figure itself, which He employed. Necessarily therefore from that consideration of the subject and figure we proceed to deduce the teaching which He gave.

What was the occasion upon which our Lord made use of these figures? They were connected with the discussion which has run through this sixth chapter on the subject of bread. We have considered that wonderful figure of speech, "the bread of life," and that Christ claimed He was the Bread of life. This follows on directly. The bread of life is the sustenance of life, the food of life; and Christ said He was that bread. Now, therefore, whatever He says about flesh and blood here, He said in close connection with that subject of bread, and must be concerned with the same theme, that, namely, of the sustenance of life. So much for the occasion.

What was He illustrating? Again we can gather into a brief sentence the answer to that enquiry. The intended revelation of the flesh and blood was that of how man could partake of the living bread, "I am the bread of life," "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; yea and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world." How can men receive that bread of life? By eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

That brings us at once to the figure. Once again we admit the startling nature of it. Let us pause with it as a figure of speech merely, flesh and blood.

The word employed for flesh here is a very familiar one to readers of the New Testament Greek, the word *sarx*. It is used in differing ways and forms; and it caught a distinctly theological sense, and was used oftentimes in that way by the apostles, by Paul especially in his writings. But get behind all that to the word. What is the flesh? It is the material side of personality, the body as differentiated from the spirit. Yet when that body is dead it is no longer flesh. Flesh demands that life be there; but it is pre-eminently personality embodied - flesh.

What is the significance of blood? However much the disciples may have been shocked as they listened to our Lord, we all know the sanctity of blood according to the whole of the Hebrew teaching under which the disciples had been brought up. We can summarize it all in one word, simple, sublime, and final, in the Old Testament; "the blood is the life." We are still in the realm of the body, and yet the blood, in its mysterious and mighty work within the body, is the element of life. Have we anything the matter with us? It can be diagnosed quite simply, our blood is not acting properly, there is some clot or hindrance. The blood is the life. It is also material, on this level; the flesh and blood.

But now notice another thing. We must get back into the atmosphere of the time. The separation of one from the other in this statement implies death. If the blood be taken away from the flesh, that means death, always. "My flesh, My blood." Mark well the inevitable strangeness of this statement of Jesus to listening Jews , and for us immediately it is evident that we cannot stay in the realm of the figure. We cannot go any farther in that direction, and we must immediately seek the spiritual intention that Jesus had. I am warranted in saying that because of what He said to these very disciples. When they said it was a hard saying, He told them, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." The true sustenance of life is flesh. He said that is "meat indeed," that is truly food. His blood is "drink indeed," that is, truly drink. Remembering the words He uttered are spirit, He is dealing with the essential nature of man, the essential hunger of man; with the essential necessity of man as to sustenance is true spiritual life. He has used figures in the realm of the material. He passes from that at once and says the flesh profits nothing, that He had spoken of the spirit; that they had to do with the essential life of the spirit.

Then He used the figure, "My flesh." How may we reverently interpret that word? I do so by going back to the beginning of the Gospel, and looking once more at that marvelous prologue that John wrote. "The Word became flesh." "He that eateth My flesh "; and the spiritual intention must inevitably be that He was referring to the whole fact of His incarnation, as placed at the disposal of humanity; the bread that will meet that hunger and satisfy their need; the eating of His flesh.

Then "His blood," necessarily as shed, necessarily as given up; and consequently as life liberated through death. Again He used a figure that shocked His disciples. They said it was rough, objectionable. But He had taken that figure, "Eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood." I will dare to put it in another form. He that appropriates for himself My nature, the nature which is here because God is incarnate, and the Word has become flesh, he that appropriates that nature; he that drinks of My blood, is he that appropriates the value coming through the fact that the blood was shed, the value of atonement and redemption. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood."

Listen to Paul. He was writing to the Galatians. " have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." Once more let us take those words of Paul, not attempting to improve upon them, for that cannot be, but let us take them in this sense. I have eaten of the flesh of the Lord Christ. I have become a partaker of His nature. The very life I now live, I live in faith. It is His life in me, dominant, regnant. I have appropriated the wonder and the mystery of the incarnation by faith in Him. Whatever there is in His life of purity, of holiness, of excellence, of beauty is mine.

The apostle was not claiming he was fully realizing it, because when he wrote to the Philippians he said, I have not yet attained, I am not perfect; but one thing I do, I press towards the mark of the prize of the high calling, whatever the attainment. There was the possession of the very nature of Christ. He had eaten of the flesh. He had partaken of the incarnation, and he was hungry no more, and the element of life was there. But he had also appropriated the value of His death, and that means first of all the cessation of all attempt at self-culture. Is not the Church of God losing sight of that to-day? On every hand to-day we are called to be Christians on the ground of seeking self-culture; and we are not accepting our relationship to Christ as a gift of grace at the foot of the Cross, the bestowment that comes to us, that can only come through the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.

Yet that is what Paul meant; and in the Philippian letter he also said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

These are figures of speech, so startling that the disciples, many of them, said they were hard, rough, and uncouth; figures of speech which immediately merge into the infinite realm, upon the wonder of the incarnation by which God can and has put at the disposal of sinning, failing, ruined man a power, not merely a pattern, but a power; and through death and the shedding of blood has put at the disposal of man burdened, a pardon and a cleansing, as well as a power.

So he that eats of the flesh, and drinks of the blood, he is a partaker of the nature of Christ in incarnation, which includes the Deity as well as the humanity; that is what Peter meant when he said we are made partakers of the Divine nature. He who has reposed his trust in Him, and received that, has eaten of His flesh; and he that reposes his trust in the mystery of Christ's shed blood has drunk of His blood; and that is meat indeed, and that is drink indeed.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he said something in this connection. "And He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh." And then the amazing thing, "Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more." Through the figure we have entered into the fact. Through that which brought Him into the presence of humanity familiarly for a generation, or for only three years perchance in public ministry, through that we have entered into fellowship with Him in the deepest things of His nature. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

So we go back and end with these words of our Lord spoken on that occasion, resolutely determined to keep them close to this whole chapter, and to interpret the figures by the great statement. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." In the realm of our spiritual nature, if we trust Him, believe in Him, yield to Him, we are made partakers of His nature, we eat His flesh, and we appropriate all the mystery of His atonement, symbolized by the shedding of blood; and we drink His blood.